

Importance of Conducting a Client Intake prior to providing an Aromatherapy Service

Valerie Cooksley, RN, Holistic Nurse Aromatherapist, Houston, TX

An ever increasing number of massage therapists are refreshing their healing profession by adding aromatherapy to their massage sessions. Essential oil therapy is unquestionably suited to massage and its therapeutic use compliments a wide variety of complaints that massage therapists see every day - stress-related issues, pain management and injury rehabilitation, headache control, and anxiety relief, end of life care, emotional stress, premenstrual syndrome, and mind/body wellness for disease prevention.

Different forms of massage styles such as Swedish, deep tissue, and specialty bodywork including reflexology, acupressure, and shiatsu naturally become techniques of applying essential oils. In addition, energetic healing modalities, for example, Healing Touch, Therapeutic Touch and Reiki, are enhanced by the subtle vibrational energy of aromatherapy. Massage therapists who employ essential oils into their practice often do not need to work as hard to achieve a focused therapeutic result.

Marguerite Maury, a prominent aromatherapy pioneer and massage therapist, stressed the importance of performing a client intake, individualizing an aromatherapy blend and choosing the best method of application, often massage and inhalation. Employed nearly exclusively in modern aromatherapy, practitioners customize to the individual as opposed to using a generic blend applied to the whole body – the one size fits all approach. As there are no two individuals exactly alike, so the treatment varies from person to person, taking into account the vital client

intake information. Aromatherapy is a holistic therapy that involves the controlled and skilled use of pure essential oils to treat the whole person, considering the whole symptom picture, to support whole health and wellbeing.

However, countless massage therapists fail to appreciate the significance of taking a thorough client intake prior to applying, what is often believed to be harmless, nice-smelling scents, massage oils and lotions. The case-taking is essentially the precursor to a successful, individualized aromatherapy session and is twofold in purpose: 1) active listening and effective questioning involving practical consultation skills and assessment; and 2) dedicated planning and carefully creating the appropriate aromatherapy treatment. Whether the outcome goal is to relax, increase energy levels, or focus on alleviating a tension headache, it is important that a client intake be completed to insure that whatever is utilized is best for the client.

The majority of this process is in knowing who you are relating to, and what conditions are presenting as the primary, in determining the right oil combination. The aim of this article is not to define the contents of a client questionnaire and history, rather to focus on the meaning of completing one. Key reasons to perform an intake includes identifying contraindications that require avoiding certain essential oils, due to risk factors, illness and medications, in addition to determining a client's stress level, emotional issues, scent preferences and aversions; possibility of pregnancy and known skin sensitivities and allergies. The latter being critical factors in determining the dilution percentage of the aromatherapy blend. The number one concern is client wellbeing, and the next is achieving a nurturing and therapeutic outcome.

The intake is more than gathering client information to select the best essential oil combination according to your professional ability in a clinical situation; it is also a principal

part of a successful holistic aromatherapy treatment and identifies a realistic goal. Only then can the therapist develop the rationale for choosing specific oils and the ideal massage technique, and/or other application method. Essential oil blends are most often prepared in a base of cold pressed vegetal oil or natural white lotion and then applied via massage keeping in mind that as a holistic therapy, both the psycho-emotional state as well as the physical body will benefit.

The client-intake, which may take 15 minutes or more depending on the consultation and the expertise of the practitioner, also establishes a therapeutic rapport by revealing immediate concerns and expectations and acts as a basis for discussion to ultimately achieve a shared understanding of the therapy session. There are many factors affecting the outcome of an aromatherapy massage treatment (client, therapist, environment, time factor, method) although it is not a complicated process and can be readily learned. However, the client intake process is first and leading, the most important. As part of the records maintained by the therapist, documentation insures the ability to duplicate blends in the future, note effectiveness of the treatment and act as a prompt to when it may be time to adjust a blend. Your professional success is directly related to performing the client intake, and in doing so, will safely meet the needs of your valuable clients.

Valerie Cooksley is an Internationally Certified Aromatherapist, Holistic Nurse, an acclaimed author of eight natural health books including the bestselling *Aromatherapy: Soothing Remedies to Restore, Rejuvenate and Heal*. She is Co-founder and Director of the Institute of Integrative Aromatherapy in Houston, Texas, where she enjoys personally mentoring students through her correspondence Certificate Program in Integrative Aromatherapy™, an NCBTMB approved and nationally endorsed professional training. www.FloraMedica.com